Tennis may be a sport for individuals but, if you’ve written it off as a group exercise, think again.

It can be quite a challenge to teach tennis in larger group situations such as schools. However, it is possible, and there are many coaches and teachers who teach tennis very effectively with groups of up to 30 players at a time. When planning a session for a larger number of players don’t think about the number of players first; instead start with the goals for the session. Once these are clear then start to plan the drills that will help the players achieve these goals. Once you are clear on the goals and the types of drills that you want to use, start to think about the number of players you are going to work with.

It is often a good idea to plan as if working with four players first and then expand the lesson plan from there. For each drill ask yourself the following questions:

How many playing areas do I have?
If you have four courts then that could be eight half-court playing areas. Although, if you have younger players this could be 12 playing areas with three per court.

How many players do I have per playing area?
Divide your number of players by the number of playing areas.

What rotation system will work for this number?

Examples are:
1. For three players: one player on their own and the other two swap with each other every point
2. For four players: two players each end swapping every time they make a mistake
3. For five players: three one end and two the other end swapping every point

Session structure
As coaches start to work with players on an ongoing basis their sessions will differ depending on where their pupils are in terms of their stage of learning, the coaching process and proximity to competitions. Coaches, therefore, need to be efficient in running a range of session types. For example:

For teaching a new skill
- Spend time with players discussing goals and the reasons for them
- Demonstrate and explain the new skill
- Use more simple “closed” practices that allow players to try out the new skill in a non-pressured situation
- Give feedback on a regular basis to keep players on track
- Be very encouraging, yet specific to keep learners positive, yet clear on what they need to do
- Possibly use a more quiet and precise coaching style

For progressing and developing a new technique
- Be very precise and be sure to see the new technique from the first ball hit
- Give players lots of repetition on the new skill
- Start to test the new skill in more challenging situations. Coaches should look to put pressure on the new skill with tougher feeds, until it starts to break down. At that point they should remind the player of the skill and encourage them to maintain it
- Break away from the skill, go and do something else, then come back to it and challenge the player to see if they can reproduce it on the first ball
- Question players to develop their understanding of when they are succeeding in the new skill and when it is breaking down. The coach should challenge players to see if they can fix any breakdowns themselves

Cementing a recently learned technique
- The coach should expect to see the new technique from the first ball hit in the session
- Put players in practice situations that involve lots of repetition on the skill
that has been learned

- Motivate players to keep the work rate high
- Occasionally praise players when the new skill is done particularly well
- Get players to repeat any situation where the new skill broke down so that they have a chance to correct it immediately
- Work with players more on the tactical implementation of the new skill rather than the skill itself

**Drill 68: Throw and catch doubles**

**Objective:** To develop spatial awareness and movement as a team in doubles.

**Equipment:** Players, court and balls.

**Description:** The players work in teams of two. One team plays against another team with all four players starting on the service line. One of the players starts the point off with an overarm throw crosscourt into the diagonal service box. The players then play the point out against each other, catching the ball after one bounce and sending it back with an underarm throw. For younger players it is best not to use the tramlines, but older and more experienced players should include them since there is more space to work with.

**Coaching points:**

1. They need to adjust their position quickly as the ball is going away from them so that they are in a good position by the time the ball comes towards them.
2. Where they recover to depends on where they threw the ball to. For example, if they throw the ball wide to one side of the court then one of the players must stay wide on the other side of the court to cover an angled reply.

**Progression:** Introduce a rule that allows players to go forwards and catch the ball before it bounces. If they do this, they are then allowed to throw the ball overarm and be more aggressive – giving them a great chance to win the point.

**Collect your thoughts**

**Objective:** A drill to raise awareness of positive and negative self-talk during competitive play.

**Equipment:** Players, court, rackets, balls, 20 clothes pegs per pair.

**Description:** Players play singles points in either the full court or half court (depending upon numbers). At the start of play the players put two piles of five pegs each at the back of their court (well behind the baseline so they don’t get in the way). One pile represents positive self-talk and the other represents negative self-talk. After each point the player moves one peg from one pile to the other depending upon their thoughts after the point. For example, if the player plays the point and has a positive thought, a peg from the negative pile is put into the positive pile and vice versa. The points are stopped when the player has collected all 10 pegs in one of the piles!

**Coaching points:** This is a great drill to raise a player’s awareness of how they think between points. The benefit of using pegs is that it allows the coach to ‘see’ the nature

**Tennis cricket**

**Objective:** A fun game that involves lots of players on one court.

**Equipment:** Players, court, rackets and balls.

**Description:** Split the players into two even teams. One team spreads out around the court at one end – this is the “fielding” team. The other team lines up one behind the other with a racket each at the other end of the court – this is the “batting” team. The batting team come in one at a time; the coach feeds each player either a forehand or a backhand from the other side of the court. The batting player hits their shot and tries to get it to bounce on the other side of the court, the fielding team try to catch the ball before it bounces. If the ball is hit out, in the net, or is caught then the hitting team lose a wicket. If the ball bounces on the court then the hitting team score runs. If it lands in the service box one run is scored, if it lands beyond the service line four runs are scored, and if the ball lands between the tramlines six runs are scored. Once five wickets fall the batting team are all out and the teams swap over.

**Coaching points:** The fielding team need to think about how to organise themselves to best cover the court, and the batting players need to decide whether to go for the more difficult shots for more runs or the easier shots for just the one run.